Journeys in Lughnasa

SELECTED POEMS

Patrick Devaney

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By Patrick Devaney

To Cheryl, our children and grandchildren

Published

by

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Journeys in Lughnasa

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INTRODUCTION

Galway Academic Press is delighted to publish ***Journeys in Lughnasa: Selected Poems*** **by Patrick Devaney**, a collection that beautifully captures the spirit of Ireland, the passage of time, and the quiet transformations of everyday life.

Devaney's poetry is distinguished by its clarity, empathy, and a deep-rooted sense of place, inviting readers to journey through landscapes both real and remembered. In poems such as "Journeys in Lughnasa," he pays moving tribute to friendship and memory, while in "O chestnut-tree," he contemplates the cycles of nature and loss with gentle wisdom.

Devaney's work is shaped by a love for Irish heritage and an understanding of the complexities of identity, as well as a desire to preserve moments of beauty and meaning. His verse moves seamlessly between personal reflection and broader historical themes, often illuminating the connections between past and present.

Whether evoking the streets of Galway, the wilds of Inishmaan, or the echoes of history in "Mellifont Visits," Devaney's poems resonate with honesty, insight, and lyrical grace.

This collection stands as a testament to his poetic brilliance, and we are honoured to bring his voice to a wider audience.

Journeys in Lughnasa

(For my friend, Michael)

While we drove out to Brigit's Garden
You were on a different journey.
Next day I phoned and you were gone.
No more chats with former fellow students
Over tea in the foyer of the Merrick,
Or just us two before a dockside joint,
Or in the kitchen of your Salthill home.
I recall your low-key unassuming
Stance, ready for any madcap dare:
That time we ventured too far out
While swimming at The Silver Strand,
Clambering up Kirkogue Mountain
To lunch on sandwiches and icicles,
Driving to Kylemore in your thirsty car,
Climbing a drainpipe to the cinema.
Between our student days
And my returning from New York
You flourished in your native city
Designing waterworks and drainage,
Then married your accomplished

Sweetheart, grew vegetables,

Rowed your children up the Corrib,

Tended that holiday home in Roundstone.

While I sought out the disappearing West

Of native speakers and The Quiet Man,

You were of the modern Galway,

Closer in spirit to Anglo-Normans

Than to marauding O'Flahertys,

And,though no template of devoutness,

Found comfort in communal prayer.

When next we visit Galway

And, walking past the cathedral,

Slowly cross the Salmon Weir

Into its memory-crowded downtown,

I'll look for you rowing up the Corrib

Towards the hinterland of Brigit's Garden

To celebrate the fruits of Lughnasa.

‘O chestnut-tree’

Maybe it’s best you went
After your autumn blaze
Beside the sombre yews
Dwindled to some gleams,
Schoolboys looted conkers
And you were left denuded,
Waiting for us
To fit you out with lights
Announcing Christmas
To the anxious street.
Now tree surgeons won’t remove
With cold precision cankered limbs
So you can carry on enhancing
Springtime with those blossoms
Which roused to joy our greatest poet –
Though all the while decay proceeds
With incremental certainty;
Yes, I would choose an end like yours,
One day regally unbowed,
The next a pile of sawn-up wood.

White Rook

The white rook's not so rare
That you may not observe from time to time
One fluttering near the lofty grove
In which the jet-black votaries reside.
He tries to blend in with the flock,
Imitating their Parnassian calls,
Strutting on their stubble fields unchecked
When twilight makes his feathers dark.
The trueborn rooks are not deceived:
They pity this deluded, tone-deaf thing
Who won't accept what destiny ordains:
White deflects the muse's gleam,
Black retains!

London

I'm tired of holding out
Against this city,
Of keeping an ex-colonial's
Perspective
When viewing all that evidence
Of past imperial greatness:
Generals on their pedestals,
Memorials to fallen servicemen,
Lions with complacent gazes…
There are statues of its writers too
And Shakespeare's recreated Globe
And all those ultramodern buildings
Jostling cut-stone period grandeur
On both sides of a mighty Thames
Enhanced by tourist boats and bridges,
Its memories of Wordsworth's sonnet,
And Boudicca on her chariot
Charging the mother house of parliaments,
But most of all its parks,
Those diligently tended flowerbeds,

The mix of native and exotic birds

Populating lake-like waters,

And always round a bend

The heart lifting unexpected:

Horse Guards rigid on their mounts,

The earliest magnolias in bloom,

Giant pelicans standing on a rock,

An Ogham stone prominent

In the British Museum.

To an Anglo-Irish Gentleman

"O what if gardens where the peacock strays…
But take our greatness with our violence? "
W.B.YEATS

Should your ghost come here today
Would it shrink from those loud boys
Smashing hollyhocks through ignorance
Or contempt for the gardener's pains?
Your grandfather would have seen them off,
A blast of cartridge pellets in the rear,
But you lived when that racial steel
Which won proud ancestors this place
Had softened in the aesthete's flame.
Hiring architect and gardener,
You tumed a nondescript demesne
Into a country-house Elysium
With clipped yew hedges, pergola,
Ionic columns, stone-carved nymphs,
And here between limes and weir-tamed river
Your mansion, with a view unmarred

By farmhouse or labourer's hovel,

Stood gazing at the peaceful hills.

Perhaps your ghost, like the lone swallow

Circling where that mansion stood,

Might breathe on those wild boys, instilling

Love of time-perfected, quiet things

Or, knowing all too well their nature,

Might bleakly smile as it recalls

How, just before the big guns spoke,

Smirks greeted your own enterprise,

Which now we strive to recreate?

Inishmaan

For Deirdre

We've set ourselves the goal of walking
Across this island to Synge's Chair,
But since there's not a road sign,
Nor soul from whom to ask directions,
We don't know if we're going astray.
Soon the boreen, flanked by chest-high walls,
Becomes a narrow path
Meandering past empty fields
Where stone-built cattle tanks are dried up husks,
Then one where goats look up, surprised.
The path ends at a gapless wall:
Ahead, wind turbines, not the chair.
"lf we don't hurry back", I warn,
"The ferry will have sailed away."
You tell us one must finish what one starts.
Perspiring, we press on once more,
Clambering over treacherous walls,
Negotiating boxed-in fields

Booby-trapped with clints and grykes,

While, like some castaway, a lapwing mews.

I climb a ridge of piled-up rocks,

Observe beyond a bare expanse

Of limestone great waves smashing home

To rise up in a burst of spray,

And there I see you striding out.

While we decide we've ventured far enough,

You stand a tiny speck beside the edge,

Gazing as Synge must once have gazed

At that great, savage, watery plain

That girds 'those lonely rocks' of Inishmaan.

Student

After Hydraulics and Maths-Physics
and stressful study in the *Aula*
Galway was *Hy-Brasil*:
***Ó Conaire* musing in Eyre Square,**
***An Silín Gort* in the Taibhdhearc,**
Walter Macken's 'Mungo's Mansion'
set in narrow Buttermilk Lane,
or better still his well-wrought novel:
'Rain on the Wind',
about a fisherman from the Claddagh,
then a thatched-house baile beag,
my landlady's fine old uncle
reciting *Anach Cuain* by heart,
Connemara *Gaeilgeoirs* in The Hangar,
a night of dancing dreams in Seapoint,
exchanging smiles in Lydon's café,
shared laughter at Danny Kaye's antics
viewed from the Astoria's balcony,
a car jaunt to half-wild *Iarconnacht*,
rowing up to Menlo castle

to jump in joy across stray boulders,
swimming at Blackrock and The Silver Strand,
or cycling in autumn out to Carraroe
hoping for a hooker trip to Aran.
Oh, I was always on the lookout
for what would stop Hy-Brasil
dissolving into afterglow.

Mellifont Visits

for Deirdre

Beyond the car-park wall,
an ornate, half-intact lavabo
and vestiges of sacred buildings
transform the level field below us,
basking in the warm September sun
like fragments of a skeleton.
Listen while Cistercians chant in Latin
to Christendom's all-powerful God
before a Tudor king usurps His role.
And look! The Anglo-Irish Moores
taking up residence after that king
Has dissolved monasteries for their wealth.
Now there's the courteous Garret Moore
leading his Ulster friend, Hugh O'Neill,
into the presence of seated Mountjoy.
Head bowed, the rebel chief falls on his knees
and makes submission to a Tudor queen,
not knowing she is dead.

But what's this? The Great O'Neill back here –
a last, sad visit to a gracious friend
before he and O'Donnell take to sea ?
Later, trailing my bright-faced daughter,
I notice a Speckled Wood stir on a briar –
do they, like Hugh, intend to flee?

‘Hand’ by Louis le Broquy

What to make of this uplifted hand
displaying its disturbing coloration,
finger-tops and palm crimsoned:
a prankster halting rush-hour traffic?
the hand of Cain or an urban terrorist?
But what if it’s the subject’s own blood
or just some bright-red paint
accidentally acquired while decorating
garden fence or indoor furniture?
Could it be the blood-red hand of Ulster,
cut off so that a chieftain
by flinging it ashore could claim that region?
But that would surely be his left hand
and this is definitely the other one –
the hand most used to exploit planet earth –
or it might be God’s right hand,
not the one depicted by Michelangelo
where Yahweh kindles life in Adam
but that of the angry ruler of the skies
drowning birds, beasts, reptiles, humans in the Flood,

raining fire and brimstone on Sodom and Gomorrah,
outdoing our most blood-soaked tyrants?
Whatever the intent, this painting of a body part –
evolved not just for showing fellowship
but for more complex tasks, writing, manipulating,
and all too often stained with blood of fellow humans
was surely created to disturb?
Since most of us now disregard 'In God We Trust',
I think this lurid artwork may be proclaiming:
'Halt, fellow naked apes,
before we nuke ourselves to dust.'

Summer 2003

for Cheryl

This was the summer when at last
My novel that seemed destined
To moulder in unpublished shame
Was launched with promising acclaim,
The summer when our pink hydrangeas
Came into most prolific bloom
And sun-blessed days found us venturing
As of old into the healing sea
Then eating sandwiches by rock-pools
While you exclaimed at crabs and shells
Or asked the names of shoreline birds.
This was the summer when our son
Sat his Leaving Cert then dipped his toe
Into the wave of self reliance,
His sisters, discontented swallows,
Set their eyes on exotic, far-off shores:
India, New Zealand, while in Japan
Another rested, and the fourth at home

Eased the drudgery of work with dreams

Of married love and continental dawns.

This was the summer when fear whispered,

'Life will never be so good again,'

The Times tossed that novel 'Beyond the Pale',

House martins, skylarks, butterflies were few,

My back disk slipped, your tear duct clogged,

Mites bit, feet ached, sleep came slow at night,

And yet the sun beguiled our waking,

Trees, lawns and hedges gleamed, corn ripened,

Gnats danced near 'drowning lily' blooms,

While swallows on electric wires

Gave twittering end-of-summer proms.

Berlin wall Memento

For Noel, its creator

This concrete fragment,
Grey, jagged-edged, austere,
Mounted on a bog-oak plinth,
Tells more than some titanic figure
Cast in bronze or iron.

This is the might of Stalin's empire,
That vast grey aggregate of people
Once thought indestructible,
Set on the heartwood of a tree
Buried for two thousand years.

The tree, born of earth and sun,
Was disinterred by workers,
The wall, devised by bureaucrats,
Was hammered down by cheering youths,
And now the two have been united:
The sullen, jagged concrete,
The shining, jet-hard wood...

Greatness

"The only virtue I claim is truth
and non-violence." - Gandhi

Great men window truth –
Great men to the end;
Others are not great though nations bend
Beneath their knitted brows
Or chant their dogmas, massed in rows.
Their lives blind synthesis commend,
Confounding those who guidance seek
Beyond mere trend;

Great men dissipate their states domain
But men whose names alone are great
Themselves contain;
Eternal mind their greatness lacks,
Consent to serve and nothing gain
Of glory or command:
The great turn sand,
Then windowpane.

The Caterpillar

My first reaction was disgust,
A long, fat caterpillar
Hurrying across the bathroom floor!
How had it gotten in?
Potted plant? Vegetables? Window?
That rain guard under our front door?
I would have thrown it out
Except that its pleasing, lime-green tone
Caused me to see it not just as it was
But as it likely would become,
A moth or butterfly,
And if a butterfly which one?
Speckled Wood? Common Blue? Meadow Brown?
I'd even settle for a moth,
Preferably a distinguished species:
Emperor, Golden Plusia, Silver Y –
Of course it might end up a mere sawfly!

I placed my larva in a cardboard box
Packed loosely with assorted leaves:

Clover, plantain, dandelion,

And others that I couldn't name –

But what if none of these were what he ate?

Had I, moved by a dilettantish whim

To find out his identity,

The right to let this creature starve,

For if I put his welfare first

I'd set him free where he could rove

In search of his own special food;

Yes, I'd let him forage for himself,

For though he still might chance to die

I'd have acknowledged that we're both

Part of the web which nature weaves –

Something that bard would certainly approve

Who told of Étain changed into a fly!

Chastened, before a week had passed

I finally opened up the box –

No sluggish caterpillar met my gaze

But in its place a leaf-brown chrysalis!

Thrilled, I told myself, 'He's better indoors now

Than outside where the night winds freeze.'

My small friend waits his metamorphosis,

Though I don't know what I will one day find,

For who can tell how anything will end,

A poem, a child, a nation – or a mind...?

Castletown House Revisited

Though fallen parapet urns have been replaced,
yew trees and garden hedges trimmed,
halls and disused rooms redecorated
and in surrounding fields and woodlands
spring's loveliest wildflowers,
cowslips, violets, anemones,
are unexpectedly in bloom,
nostalgia tempers my delight
since those who first created this Elysium
are, for all their labours, only present now
as formal portraits, marble effigies,
and though their walks are freshly graveled,
footbridges modernized, a wall repointed,
my mind keeps drifting back to one bright day
when we with five excited children
walked a hoof-scored path by the gazebo
down to the tree-lined, rushing river,
not knowing it swept youth away.

Military Graveyard, Dublin

Rose bushes brighten headstones
in regimented rows of grey:
Argyle and Sutherland Highlanders,
forgetting Culloden and Clearances;
Australians, New Zealanders,
South Africans, Canadians
bleeding for distant Empress or King,
and, from this fractured island,
side by side, Inniskillings moulder
with Connaught Rangers, Dublin Fusiliers.

How many varied ranks lie here:
dragoons, lancers, gunners, sailors,
airmen climbing to the stars,
captains, lieutenants, chaplains,
generals with quadruple names,
a 'Boy' with none at all,
army wives and children,
serving, 'Wherever right and glory leads',
in defence of an empire

on which the sun never set.

After the endless wars, all's now peaceful,
so that a worker's sit-on mower
accentuates the silence –
And look! Beneath those evergreens,
a blackbird, half decayed, reminder of
that poet who mourned our 1916 poets,
then died at Ypres, far from quiet Slane,
and of that Dublin poet,
fighting for small nations' freedom,
who died at Ginchy on the Somme.

‘Humanity Dick’ Martin

Here in *Tígh Neachtain*, your Galway townhouse,
I bring to mind your disparate credentials:
actor, duelist, MP, exiled bankrupt,
short, thick-set, compassionate firebrand,
‘Hairtrigger Dick’,‘King of Connemara’.

You were a dangerous man to challenge
but one supreme insult took place unnoticed,
Theobald Wolfe Tone, whom you employed
to tutor those teenage half-brothers,
was said to have become your spouse’s lover.

And, yet, you later had the satisfaction
of suing her Parisian paramour
on a charge of ‘criminal conversation’,
then tossing the ten thousand pounds awarded
to beggars from your carriage window.

Well, that at least is what’s been written,
then, years later, you were mistakenly lampooned

for taking a beaten donkey into court,
but, despite the supercilious laughter,
George the Fourth gave you that crowning nickname.

By most accounts then, you were a mixture
Of progressive thinker and upper-class buffoon;
you even acted the stage Irishman
inside the English House of Commons,
amusing MPs with a put-on brogue.

But that was just a clever stratagem
to disarm those condescending critics
of civil rights, Catholic Emancipation;
it also helped in your supreme achievement,
curbing man's abuse of poor, dumb animals.

This evening, in your natal 'city of the tribes',
I think of you, an exile in Boulogne,
still confronting man's innate brutality
and raise my glass to you, wild Connemara king:
'*Slán agus beannacht*, farewell and a blessing.'

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Patrick Devaney's poems have appeared in *Revival*, *The Galway Review*, *Boyne Berries*, *The Stony Thursday Book*, *Crannóg,* and other magazines.

He has published nine novels, including *Through the Gate of Ivory*, *Romancing Charlotte*, written under the pen name Colin Scott, and *The Grey Knight: A story of Love in Troubled Times.*

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